Defining AI Literacy

A Cohort For Community Colleges

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The rapid spread of generative AI has led to widespread calls for integrating AI literacy into postsecondary education. Given that over 40 percent of undergraduate students are enrolled in community colleges—and that community colleges often serve as the starting point for students seeking a bachelor's degree, particularly for students of color, low-income students, and adult learners, it is critical to introduce AI literacy within community colleges. And librarians, with their unique expertise in the information environment and as key providers of instruction, services, and resources in data, digital, and information literacies, are well positioned to lead their institutions.

But what, exactly, is AI literacy, and what is its relationship to other forms of information literacy? How might well-established frameworks like the ACRL's Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education be adapted and revised to ensure that students gain the skills they will need to engage critically in civic life and build successful careers? How can libraries, along with other campus units support AI literacy for students and faculty on campus?

Following two years of successful engagement with over 70 institutions, Ithaka S+R is organizing a cohort for community colleges to explore definitions of AI literacy and learn from faculty and student experiences. Each participating institution will work in collaboration with Ithaka S+R and in conversation with other cohort members to understand the changing information practices and needs of students and instructors, and identify how libraries and other campus units can weave AI literacy into their existing operations, leveraging programs or initiatives that center on information, digital, or metaliteracy.

How will the program work?

Ithaka S+R will select 12-15 community colleges with deep commitments to promoting AI literacy as a core learning outcome to participate in the cohort. Each participating institution will appoint one to three individuals to serve as the local team. The local teams should include at least one representative from the library but may also include members from other relevant campus units such as centers for teaching and learning.

Across the six month program, participants will participate in three virtual workshops in which they will identify and prioritize core aspects of AI literacy, map out how AI literacy needs apply to different stakeholders at their institutions, gain a deeper understanding of AI literacy needs of faculty and students across the country, and identify gaps in their institution's current AI support and ideate solutions. Throughout the program, Ithaka S+R will share emerging themes and examples from the cohort with stakeholders, share insights from our previous AI literacy cohorts, and offer 1:1 meetings and support when needed.

Program Timeline

Workshop 1: Defining AI Literacy

The first workshop will focus on defining AI literacy, drawing on frameworks from Educause, UNESCO, and Digital Education Council, as well as other emerging AI literacy frameworks. Participants will then consider how and if existing frameworks align with community college environments, missions, and student populations and needs.

Workshop 2: Student & Faculty Experiences - the National Landscape

Ithaka S+R will present a landscape review of findings from interviews with faculty and students about their experiences and needs vis-à-vis AI literacy, gathered from the 58 colleges and universities that previously participated in our cohort research projects.

On-campus Engagement & Learning

Ithaka S+R will provide materials for institutions to conduct on-campus data collection to support improving the quality of AI literacy programming and resources available on-campus. We will provide question banks for focus groups and interviews and provide training and support to institutions as they collect data from instructors.

Workshop 3: Identifying Gaps & Ideating Interventions

During this final session, participants will use learnings from the previous three workshops and on-campus data-collection to identify gaps in support needs and potential challenges at their institutions. They will then participate in a group ideation activity to begin envisioning new or improved services, programs, or other forms of support for AI literacy that they can realistically implement on their respective campuses.

What costs and resources can be anticipated?

We anticipate that the program will require a total of approximately 20 hours of staff time, to be distributed across the project team. To defray costs, each institution will make a cost-sharing contribution of $6,000.

What steps do I need to take?

If your institution is interested in participating, please send an expression of interest to Dylan Ruediger (dylan.ruediger@ithaka.org).

About Ithaka S+R

Through research, collaboration, and innovation, Ithaka S+R informs policy, guides strategies, and builds evidence-based tools to broaden access to postsecondary education, improve student and workforce outcomes, and advance scholarship. Ithaka S+R is part of ITHAKA, a nonprofit with a mission to improve access to knowledge and education for people around the world. We have a strong track record of working on strategy and leadership issues for research libraries across North America. Biographical information on project team members is available on our website for Claire Baytas, Mark McBride, and Dylan Ruediger. Our expertise is derived from an unparalleled understanding of the strategic directions of academic libraries and generative AI as situated inside public higher education institutions.